

Granite State Home and Garden
Immediate Release

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Finding a Pet for the Holidays

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There are a lot of New Hampshire families that will get a new pet for the holidays. If you are among them, there are a few things to keep in mind that can help to make your experience more cheerful.

First, pet shops and animal shelters / rescues / SPCAs / humane societies operating in the state are supposed to be licensed with the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food in accordance with RSA 437. This also requires them to publicly display a copy of that license, so ask if you do not see one.

Licensed facilities are regularly inspected by department staff for compliance with sanitation and animal health requirements. As well, by getting your next family pet from a licensed facility, you are provided with a consumer guarantee for a refund or new animal. The licensing statute allows the consumer to return the dog, cat, or ferret to the facility if the animal is found to be unhealthy by your veterinarian within 14 days of you taking ownership; a certificate from your veterinarian must be brought with the animal within 2 days of your visit to the veterinarian in order to return it.

As a practice, it is always a good idea to take any new pet in to see your veterinarian within a week of it coming into your home. This will allow the veterinarian to establish a relationship with your new pet; will provide you with a baseline for future health issues; and will hopefully allow you to determine that your new pet is healthy.

Whether you get your new pet from a licensed facility, or a private sale, New Hampshire law states that you should be getting a copy of the most recent health certificate with the animal. These health certificates are valid for 14 days in New Hampshire. There is an exception for local animals that have been obtained from a licensed animal shelter / rescue / SPCA / humane society.

For the last several years, there has been a growing trend to use the internet for finding a new pet. The New Hampshire licensing laws and rules also address this route, but the ability to provide and enforce accountability for consumer protection becomes a much larger challenge – how can you easily return a sick puppy or kitten to an e-mail address or website if you only met the person in a parking lot or on the internet?

Regardless of the source, remember that all pets are a great responsibility and require a significant amount of care. Also remember that this is a long-term commitment that you are entering since most of our pets will live 5 to 15 years. Various surveys and estimates place the average cost of owning a dog at \$8,000 to \$12,000 (that averages out to over \$800 per year) – remember that these are average costs, most of which are basic maintenance like food, licensing, leashes, etc.

For more information contact the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food or Steve Crawford, State Veterinarian, at 271-2404; scrawford@agr.state.nh.us; or <http://agriculture.nh.gov/>. You can also check the pet shop and shelter laws at <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/NHTOC/NHTOC-XL-437.htm> and the rules at <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rules/agr1700.html>.

If you are going to get a new family pet this holiday season please know that you are making a worthwhile investment, but one that will be with you for many happy holidays to come. Have a happy and safe holiday!

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